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ABSTRACT

Despite political gains and the lowering of social barriers, most Southern blacks still face formidable economic obstacles. More than half of rural Southern black families are living at or below poverty level. Efforts to improve their lot have included a number of cooperative and self-help community programs. The Southern Cooperative Development Fund, the Mississippi Action for Community Education, and the Southeast Alabama Self-Help Association are among those receiving large scale assistance from the Ford Foundation. The common goal of the three organizations is to enable those who wish to remain in the South to do so by providing a social and economic environment in which people can live and work with dignity and security. Their combined efforts include: funding to establish consumer, agricultural marketing and fishing cooperatives and credit unions; scholarships and other types of educational assistance; lobbying efforts; advancement of civil rights; demands for equalization of community services; creation of ombudsman agencies for the rural poor; establishment of health care services; and economic development of manufacturing, housing, construction, and financial services. This document reports on the growth of each of the three organizations and describes specific projects undertaken to provide opportunities and a better life for the South's rural poor. (DS)

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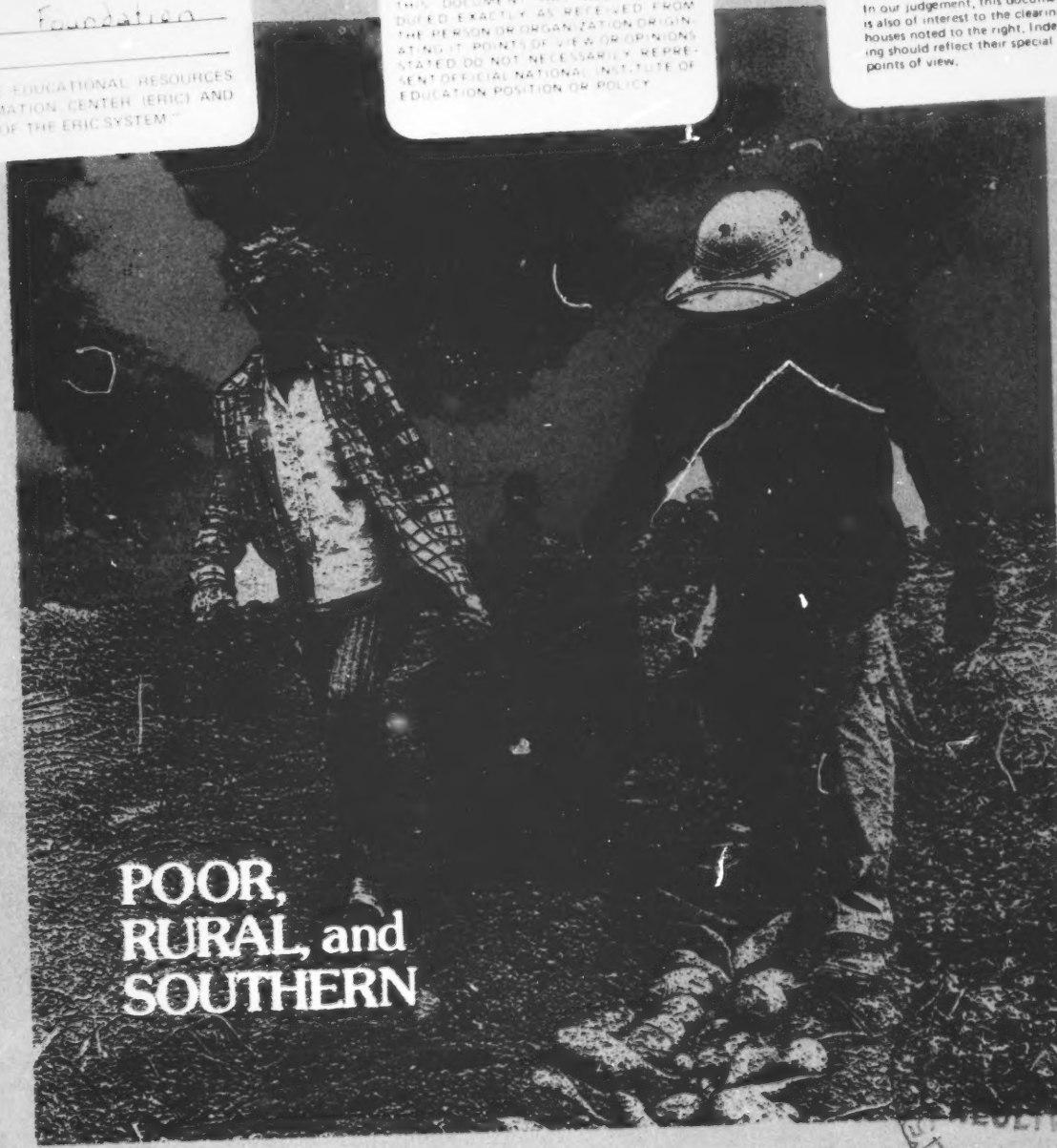

POOR, RURAL, and SOUTHERN

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Text by Robert E. Anderson, Jr.

Cover—Sweet potatoes are harvested in Louisiana on a farm affiliated with a Southern Cooperative Development Fund member cooperative. The fund is helping rural blacks improve their economic condition and safeguard their social and political rights.

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A FORD FOUNDATION REPORT

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One of a series of reports on activities supported by the Ford Foundation. A complete list of Foundation publications may be obtained from the Foundation's Office of Reports, 320 East 43 Street, New York, New York 10017.

The American South has long had a singular attraction for scholars and journalists. The region has seemed to embody all our social and racial tensions. It has been all too easy to find in that society extreme examples of poverty and racism—and the corrosive effects of both on the lives of people. In the last two decades a great deal of change has come to the South. Blacks at last have gained the right to vote, the right to equal educational opportunity, the right to equal employment—and the right to eat a hamburger at a lunch counter. In addition, the attitudes of Southern whites have moderated to a degree that would have seemed impossible not too long ago.

But harsh realities remain. Despite political gains and the lowering of social barriers, most Southern blacks still face formidable economic obstacles. Although they constitute 20 per cent of the region's population, their share of the financial benefits of the region's economy is far below that mark.

The consequences of economic obstacles to the well-being of Southern blacks are readily apparent in Bureau of the Census statistics. With 25 per cent of the nation's total population, the South is home for 38 per cent of the nation's poor. Comparisons between black and white poverty are even more dramatic. More than half of rural Southern black families are living at or below the poverty level, while only 17 per cent of rural Southern white families live in such conditions. Almost half of Southern farm laborers and about one-fourth of all Southern farm owners live in poverty. However, the percentage of black farm *owners* who are poor is nearly as high as the percentage for all farm *laborers*—58 per cent for black farm owners and per cent for farm laborers. (The average black-owned farm, is only about one-fourth the size of the average white-owned farm.)

The Southern farm population has declined sharply in recent decades. From 1960 to 1970, the number of farm workers dropped from approximately 3 million to about 1.7 million. The total rural population, however, has remained constant. About 42 per cent of the total Southern population lives in rural areas—5.7 million people on farms, but 15 million off the farm.

Many thoughtful Southerners have become increasingly concerned about the consequences to the South of the displacement of its agricultural workers and the neglect of the needs of its rural

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people in general. For example, the Southern Regional Council and the Southern Growth Policies Board, both of which receive support from the Ford Foundation, have analyzed the Southern rural needs. In 1977 the Council's Task Force on Southern Rural Development issued a report based on the deliberations of Southern leaders from diverse backgrounds.* The report calls for governmental action to make rural areas more attractive to their residents through more effective manpower policies, better health-care delivery, increased rural credit, and better housing. Such improvements, the Task Force report says, would make it possible for more people to remain in the rural South and would also relieve pressures on the cities that now absorb the in-migration.

Two years earlier, the Southern Growth Policies Board study, which treated rural needs as just one of several subjects, did note that rural areas have special problems to be solved.** It, too, recommended ways to achieve a better quality of life in rural areas; these include measures to improve health-care delivery, housing, and land use.

Both reports support the idea of self-help among the poor, and the Task Force report explicitly urges the strengthening of poor people's cooperatives as a means toward self-help. "The rationale for a development cooperative or CDC [community development corporation] is fairly clear," the report states. "Private market forces are likely to isolate many people and places from the development process....In the rural South, the old plantation areas with heavy black populations are often ignored. Firms seeking profits alone tend to avoid these locations....The major advantage of a successful development organization is its ability to meet a variety of community needs and remain relatively independent of local political and economic power structures."

Examples of cooperative and self-help community-development efforts are now found in many places in the rural South. Several of these have received financial aid and technical assistance from the Ford Foundation. With a few exceptions, the Foundation is completing large-scale assistance to such ventures, so the following informal account of their work may be of interest.

Movements and Leaders

One time-honored sign of a people's social or economic despair is its pattern of migration. During World War II and for many years after, some three million Southern blacks, driven from the land by mechanization and barred by discrimination from decently paying jobs, moved to the large cities of the North. Most were tragically ill-prepared to compete in an industrial job market and to adjust to the pace and pressures of urban life. But the out-migration of blacks is now considerably less than it was ten years ago. Blacks are more and more coming to see that Detroit, Chicago, Washington, and New York are not utopias.

Increasingly, blacks are opting to stay in the South. Many of them feel that the South is their home not merely by geographical happenstance

*_Increasing the Options_ (Atlanta: April 1977). The Task Force included at various times the then governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter; economics professor Juanita Kreps, now Secretary of Commerce; and prominent leaders of the Southern cooperative movement. The principal author of the report was F. Ray Marshall, now Secretary of Labor.

**_The Future of the South_ (Research Triangle Park, North Carolina: 1975).

but by social and cultural heritage. The civil rights movement, although it did not itself appreciably alter the economic condition of Southern blacks, had much to do with this change of attitude. It wrought dramatic changes in the social and political life of the South and, in addition, helped create conditions under which economic change could also take place.

Today, the legacy of the civil rights movement is found not only in Montgomery, Birmingham, Selma, and other battleground cities known so well to civil rights activists of the sixties, but also in the South's rural areas. It is found in places such as Lafayette, Louisiana, where the Reverend Albert McKnight, an intense and dedicated Roman Catholic priest, directs the Southern Cooperative Development Fund; in Greenville, Mississippi, where Charles Bannerman, outgoing, entrepreneurial, and gregarious, directs the Delta Foundation and an organization called Mississippi Action for Community Education; and in Tuskegee, Alabama, where John Brown, a taciturn former high school teacher, provides effective, low-profile leadership to the Southeast Alabama Self-Help Association.

These men and their organizations, and other leaders and organizations like them, are dedicated to improving the lot of Southern rural blacks. The organizations include veterans of the civil rights struggle who are mindful of the continuing need to guard social and political rights. But their main concern today is to foster the economic well-being of their constituents, particularly through self-help programs and cooperative economic institutions. The common goal of the three organizations described in this report is to enable those who wish to remain in the rural South to do so. They aim to achieve their goal by providing a social and economic environment in which people can live and work with dignity and security.

The Southern Cooperative Development Fund

From its beginnings in the 1960s, a certain romantic optimism surrounded the Southern rural movement. Here were poor people who had no economic or political power. To gain real equality of opportunity they had to have both. Those in the movement saw that the only way for the poor to exert leverage was through grass-roots organizations and cooperatives.

Today the South's cooperatives and community development corporations are far more sophisticated than they were in their fledgling period, when, it seemed, success was contingent only upon faith, hope, and trust in the benevolence of private foundations. Today they have learned that survival is impossible without sound management, too.

"It's true that cooperatives were seen as a panacea for the evils afflicting poor people," says the director of the Southern Cooperative Development Fund, Father McKnight, a Northern-born black who has lived in the South for twenty-four years. "A lot of us thought, or maybe just hoped, that everything could be changed overnight just because it needed to be. We underestimated the difficulties in economic development and in human development."

To understand why Father McKnight links the two kinds of development, one has to know what it was like to be black and poor in the rural South even twenty-five years ago. Poverty statistics do not tell the whole story. Father McKnight came to

Lafayette, Louisiana, in 1953 as a parish priest, one of the first black priests in the state. "I saw the self-hatred of young black children, the lack of belief adults had in themselves. All of it amid the worst kind of poverty. I wanted to do something, but my bosses told me my job was 'to save souls.'" In 1957 he was transferred to Abbeville, a few miles away. Here he had a different "boss," who gave him carte blanche to try to develop the human resources of the community. The illiteracy rate in and around Abbeville was the third highest rate of all the nation's counties. Father McKnight set up adult literacy classes, but he found it difficult to persuade people to attend. "They had so little faith in themselves," he recalls.

In 1963 Father McKnight, taking another approach, founded the Southern Consumers' Cooperative. Today he points to its general manager, Alfred McZeal, as an illustration of human development within the cooperative movement. McZeal has had little formal education, and before joining Father McKnight's staff he had worked as a porter in a five-and-ten-cent store in Lafayette. The store had gone out of business, and he had lost his job. When he went with a friend to a co-op meeting, he joined the organization on the spot. Then, on his own initiative, he persuaded others, too, to join. The cooperative then hired him as a recruiter working on commission, and finally he joined the staff full time.

McZeal regards the opportunity that McKnight's organization gave him as one of the most important events in his life. He has now been to management school and is an enthusiastic and resourceful promoter of the co-op's varied activities. During the 1976 Christmas season, for example, he pursuaded a local television station to contribute prime-time advertising worth more than $15,000 for one of the cooperative's products, Acadian Delight Fruit Cake. He expresses little surprise at this and other successes: "People want to help other people, and when you give someone a chance to help someone else, it's easy to be a good salesman."

The Southern Cooperative Development Fund (SCDF) is an umbrella organization that has grown out of the Southern Consumers' Cooperative. SCDF has drawn financial support from various sources, with the Office of Economic Opportunity providing the bulk of its funding. It has also received support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Field Foundation, the New York Foundation, the United States Catholic Conference, and the Ford Foundation. SCDF has several subsidiaries and affiliates:

—The Southern Development Foundation, to which the Ford Foundation has given substantial support since 1973, is a technical-assistance and long-range-planning resource for rural cooperatives. It is also responsible for developing innovative cooperative models.

—The Southern Consumers' Cooperative still operates three wholly owned businesses of its own: a personal loan company called People's Enterprises, the Acadian Delight Bakery, and a trailer park.

—The SCDF Investment Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary, is licensed by the Small Business Administration (SBA) as a Minority-Enterprise Small Business Investment Corporation (MESBIC). MESBIC is a government plan to turn the trickle of private capital for black and other minority-owned business into a flow. MESBICs are small business investment com-

Worker at the Grand Marie Vegetable Cooperative in Lafayette, Louisiana, loads yams for shipping. The cooperative is one of several to which the Southern Cooperative Development Fund has made loans and given technical assistance.

panies. For their loans and investments MESBICs use their own capital, which is raised from private sources and matched by federal funds from the SBA. MESBICs that have private invested capital of less than $500,000 can obtain up to three times the amount of private capital through the sale of debentures to SBA. MESBICs with more than $500,000 in private capital can obtain up to four times that amount through the sale of debentures and preferred stock to SBA. Where larger amounts of capital are required for a single venture, a MESBIC may arrange a syndication of several MESBICs or other banks and financial institutions to complete the total financing for a minority-owned company. The primary purpose of the SCDF Investment Corporation is to provide loans and other economic and technical assistance to poor, rural, minority enterprises.

—The Southern Consumers Education Foundation is the social-service arm of the Southern Consumers' Cooperative. It awards scholarships, operates tutoring programs, conducts voter-education campaigns, and publishes newsletters.

SCDF assists thirty-eight cooperatives in eight Southern states. The list includes consumer co-ops, credit unions, agricultural marketing co-ops, and fishing co-ops. Altogether more than 10,000 families benefit from the organization's services. SCDF is currently working to improve the marketing capabilities of cooperatives and to establish a mechanism to help these organizations acquire land and equipment. It hopes to develop at least ten co-ops that can operate successfully without outside financial assistance. SCDF itself is striving to become self-sufficient by generating enough income to cover operating expenses.

SCDF receives loan applications from co-ops throughout the year. Most of the applications would have little chance of approval by banks and other conventional lending institutions, which make such decisions strictly on the basis of economics, with little regard for the possible social benefits of a particular venture. SCDF takes both sound business practices and social consequences into account.

A loan application to SCDF is first reviewed by analysts who examine the business plan, identify and obtain missing information, and meet with co-op members to determine collateral requirements. A full SCDF staff meeting is then held to make a decision on the application. Loan applications must meet several criteria to win approval. The proposed loan must be compatible with SCDF's purpose of meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. SCDF must be satisfied with the quality of the management of the enterprise and must be persuaded that the business contemplated has a reasonable chance of financial success. Before approving a loan for the farming of a particular crop, for example, staff economists examine long-term reports on the commodity to determine the most advantageous time to enter that particular market. (In addition, the SCDF staff stands ready to assist inexperienced administrators of co-ops in solving financial, production, and market problems they may encounter once the loan is made.) The co-op seeking help must demonstrate a real commitment to the venture on the part of its board and members. To ensure this commitment, SCDF usually requires members to share the risks through stock ownership in the co-op or other means. SCDF also requires security

through mortgages or some other form of collateral. Most of the forty co-ops assisted by SCDF over the years are financially strong now.

Loans have been made to cooperatives such as Mana-Hill in Palmetto, Florida, a tomato co-op that has become SCDF's most financially successful venture; the Leflore County Area Cooperative, which grows rice and soybeans on a 3,000-acre tract in Mississippi; the Hilton Head, South Carolina, fishing cooperative, which harvests a profitable shrimp crop; the Santee Production Agricultural Cooperative in South Carolina, which markets fresh vegetables and supplies members with fertilizer, chemicals, and hardware; the Eastern Georgia Cooperative, which grows and markets "natural" foods and sells farm supplies; and the Sea Island Farmers Cooperative, which operates a tomato-packing plant in South Carolina.

SCDF's MESBIC program, one of its most promising ventures, has been in operation since April 1973. Over half of the $970,000 in MESBIC funds originally available for loans to minority business enterprises has already been distributed, and new Congressional legislation affecting the issuance of preferred stock by MESBICs has now, in effect, doubled SCDF's ability to provide loans. Among the businesses already funded is a supermarket in Atlanta, which received $55,000 in investments and $25,000 in loans. MESBIC has also assisted a supermarket in Knotts County Kentucky (a $114,000 loan) and a black-owned offshore oil-equipment company in Louisiana. SCDF is considering starting new businesses in brickmaking and plastics with MESBIC funding.

SCDF is also developing an ambitious Agricultural Cooperative Community (ACC), modeled after the Israeli *moshav*, a cooperative settlement of small individual farms. Israeli experts are providing technical assistance for the venture. "The big mistake small farmers often make," says Father McKnight, "is trying to do all the things large farmers do, which require a lot of capital. Small farmers can compete in, say, vegetable farming, which is what the cooperative community farm would be involved in." However, he notes, one of the difficulties small farmers still have is that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Extension Service has not adequately served the interests of small farmers, black or white. Says Father McKnight, "Even if they wanted to do so I think they are so geared toward agribusiness that it would be hard for them to be helpful. They don't understand small-scale farming." The Agricultural Cooperative Community is an attempt at least partially to overcome this difficulty.

While it is developing plans for one or more agricultural communities, SCDF has opened an experimental farm to determine which vegetables can best be produced in the area proposed for the ACC. The farm is situated on a parcel of the 5,000 acres owned by SCDF in Sunset, Louisiana, the future site of the ACC. The farm was formerly occupied by SCDF's Grand Marie Vegetable Co-op.

Wilbert Guillory, formerly the manager of the vegetable co-op, is in charge of the experimental farm. Middle-aged now, he has been a farmer all his adult life. He believes that vegetable growing is a realistic way for small farmers to survive and that unlike raising cotton and other major commodity crops, it is labor-intensive and requires little capital or mechanization. In addition, as Guillory points out, Louisiana itself provides a market for vegetables. Vegetable production has so declined in

Louisiana over the past thirty-five years that the state now imports 80 per cent of its produce. Costs to the consumer are higher, and the quality of produce is lower than before.

The farm is experimenting with mustard greens, onions, turnips, Chinese cabbage, string beans, collards, and carrots. It also grows strawberries. Early indications are that mustard greens may be the area's most successful product. In any case, it is expected that whatever lessons are learned from the experimental farm will eventually be applied to the much larger community farm.

SCDF hopes to begin the Agricultural Cooperative Community with fifteen families, the minimum number it feels is needed for successful operation of the project. It also prefers that the head of the family be relatively young—under thirty-five—since a prime objective of the community project is to encourage young people to stay in rural areas. Jobs must be created to provide such encouragement, points out Father McKnight. Further, he notes, "you can create more jobs in the type of agriculture we're talking about with less investment than you can in manufacturing."

Vorius Wheeler, a twenty-five year-old native of Sunset who has agreed to join the community, is typical of the kind of person SCDF hopes to attract. Wheeler works with Wilbert Guillory on the experimental farm. He grew up on a farm and does not want to work in a local mill. Neither does he want to move North or even to a Southern city if he can make a living on a farm.

Recruitment to ACC is slow, however. None of Vorius Wheeler's friends has so far been willing to follow his lead, preferring the "excitement" of town life and factory jobs. Eddie Guidor, who owns a seven-acre farm and works in a local mill, would like to be part of the new agricultural community, but he is beyond the ideal age limit the community hopes to maintain. It remains to be seen whether exceptions will have to be made in order to meet the minimum number of fifteen families required to launch the experiment.

Another reason for the slow pace of recruitment may be that the original plan for the community called for all members to live in housing provided by the cooperative. Some potential candidates are reluctant, however, to move from their present homes. In the original plan, community living and community decision-making were to be encouraged. Father McKnight concedes that the independent streak common to most Southern farmers, black and white, undoubtedly accounts for some resistance to the kind of community living envisaged by the farm's sponsors.

In any case, plans for housing and community living have been postponed for the immediate future. "The cost of housing would be too much for us right now," Father McKnight explained. "What we will do is allow people to continue to live where they are and work on the farm during the day." Wilbert Guillory believes that the best spur to recruitment may be in the ever-present possibility that farm laborers will lose their jobs because of further farm mechanization. Such people, he believes, will greatly prefer Agricultural Cooperative Communities to leaving the land or to having their families supported by public assistance.

Today, most local and state politicians look with favor upon the Southern Cooperative Development Fund. This has not always been the case. In 1967 SCDF was accused by a local newspaper of harboring communist sympathizers on its staff. The accusatory articles were written after SCDF

organized a local community-action agency to administer the federal government's first Head Start program in the state. County officials had previously refused to undertake such a program, but when they saw how much federal money was involved, they displayed both envy and hostility. A state legislative committee held hearings on the communism charge, but Father McKnight refused to participate. In April 1967, the district attorney and the sheriff raided the organization's headquarters, seized its books, and demanded membership lists. McKnight refused to turn over the membership lists and was charged by the state with mismanagement. Eventually the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals exonerated Father McKnight of any wrong-doing.

More wrenching to Father McKnight than the state's harassment, however, was the split that occurred in 1971 between SCDF and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, a sister organization formed earlier by Father McKnight and others to assist co-ops throughout the Southeast. At the outset the two organizations had been closely affiliated. SCDF was to make loans only to Federation cooperatives, and although SCDF's lending authority was independent of the Federation, the Federation's director, Charles Prejean, served on SCDF's loan committee. In effect, SCDF became the lending institution while the Federation provided technical and management assistance to the cooperatives and SCDF.

In the fall of 1971, the Office of Economic Opportunity announced its intention to evaluate poor people's cooperatives it was funding, including the Federation. Believing that the evaluation was designed to support a prior but as yet unannounced OEO decision to discontinue funding cooperatives, both SCDF and the Federation refused to participate in the study. SCDF eventually agreed to participate in the evaluative process, but the Federation remained opposed. OEO thereupon determined that only SCDF could apply for the grant renewal. Another major issue that separated the two organizations concerned credit policies and the distribution of organization funds.

Mississippi Action for Community Education and the Delta Foundation

On a Sunday afternoon in the spring of 1967, two white physicians who were conducting a survey for the Field Foundation came to Belzoni, Mississippi, and spent three hours talking to black families. Their findings on this visit and on visits to similar places in rural Mississippi would later help awaken the nation to the fact of hunger and malnutrition in the United States and would trigger legislation leading to an expanded food-stamp program and maternal and infant feeding programs. The doctors wrote, "In sum, we saw children who are hungry and who are sick—children for whom hunger is a daily fact of life and sickness, in many forms, an inevitability. We do not want to quibble over words, but 'malnutrition' is not quite what we found; the boys and girls we saw were hungry—weak, in pain, sick; their lives are being shortened; they are, in fact, visibly and predictably losing their health, their spirits, their energy. They are suffering from hunger and disease and... they are dying from them—which is exactly what 'starvation' means."*

At the time of the doctors' visit, much of rural

*Hungry Children (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, May 1967).

Mississippi was still a harsh, unyielding racist society, little changed by the civil rights movement of the 1960s. In its racial attitudes Belzoni itself was known as one of the state's most rigid towns. A local black leader had been shot to death by white vigilantes only a few years before. As the doctors proceeded on that Sunday from one black home to another, the chief of police followed behind them in his car, and a small crowd of unfriendly whites gathered across the street. The afternoon ended without incident, yet the presence of the police was plainly intended to intimidate, and a sense of fear was pervasive.

The pace of life has not changed much in Belzoni in the eleven years since that episode, and some local practices also remain unchanged. Because the town boundaries have been drawn so as to exclude black neighborhoods, blacks cannot vote in local elections and have no claim on city services. But there has nevertheless been a decided change in atmosphere. The town's schools are integrated, and blacks and moderate whites do not live with a day-to-day consciousness of racial tension. The black population of Belzoni enjoys an additional sense of security (and pride) in the support it receives from (and gives to) the local office of Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE).

MACE, a strong, versatile organization headquartered in Greenville, originated in the civil rights movement. (A MACE representative, in fact, helped guide the visiting doctors on their 1967 trip to Belzoni and other Mississippi localities.) The founders of the organization described their purpose as being "an institutional means to realize the social and economic rights that civil rights protest activities and legislation could not."

Paramount among the founders' goals was community organization in an eleven-county area of the Mississippi Delta. The area is predominantly rural and agricultural, and its population is widely dispersed. The major crop is cotton, but soybeans and rice are also grown. The production of beef cattle has also emerged in recent years as a major undertaking. Technological advances in agriculture, however—particularly mechanization of cotton farming over the past twenty years—have brought about a loss of almost 300,000 farm jobs in Mississippi, 40 per cent of the total number of jobs available in 1950. The majority of those thrown out of work have been black, and most of them had worked as sharecroppers on cotton plantations. One result of the loss of jobs has been a great exodus of blacks from the Delta.

Unemployment rates today in the eleven Delta counties exceed national and state averages. For males in the state the rate is around 9 per cent; for females it is 13 per cent. In the MACE Delta counties the rate is 12 per cent for males and 20 per cent for females. Some 75 per cent of the area's unemployed males and 80 per cent of the unemployed females are black.

Census figures further reveal the extent of poverty in the Delta. In Madison County, 61.1 per cent of the families live below the poverty level; in Humphreys County, the figure is 77.4 per cent. The measure of poverty in other counties ranges between these two figures. Mean family income in Madison County is $2,252; in Humphreys County it is $1,686. In Madison County, 34.7 per cent of the families receive public assistance; in Humphreys County, 50 per cent.

For organizational purposes, MACE divides the Delta counties into two categories—the six core

A community-owned superette (left) and a blue-jeans manufacturing plant in Greenville (below) are among the minority-owned and operated enterprises fostered by Mississippi Action for Community Education and its community development arm, the Delta Foundation.

counties, in which MACE works full time, and the five technical-assistance counties. In the latter, MACE provides only limited technical assistance. Its reasons for the limitation of its efforts include rivalries with local organizations in some counties and lack of receptivity to community organizing in others. Each of the eleven counties elects two representatives to the MACE board of directors. MACE has approximatley 23,000 members, who pay annual dues of $5 each.

New MACE field workers take part in a thirty-day training program at the organization's headquarters, followed by a two-month trial period in the field. They are instructed in the rules and regulations for filing for public assistance, food stamps, Social Security benefits, and Medicare and Medicaid. They are also taught how to file complaints with public agencies and how to conduct public meetings.

Field workers serve MACE members in several ways. In 1976, for example, MACE workers in Holmes County and the staff at Greenville won a major victory by achieving equal public services for blacks. The precedent for such equalization had been set in the landmark *Shaw* decision in 1973, when the Supreme Court ruled that a pattern of discrimination against blacks existed in the town of Shaw, Mississippi, because blacks did not enjoy equality with whites in the provision of street paving, street lighting, and other public facilities and services.

Little had been achieved in Shaw itself since the decision because no organized follow-up effort at the local level was made. But in Lexington, a town of some 3,000 in Holmes County, the local MACE chapter, led by Howard Bailey, chairman of MACE's board, undertook a detailed civic survey. MACE members determined where whites and blacks lived, and they acquired a map showing how city services, including water and sewage facilities, were distributed. Their comparison of the distribution with housing patterns showed discrimination against blacks. Assisted by MACE attorneys, the local group filed suit, asking for equalization. Since the suit was filed, more than $1.3 million in services have been provided to Lexington's black neighborhoods. Indeed, the attitude of local officials has changed from resistance to cooperation in the equalization effort, in large part because MACE attorneys have helped the officials prepare applications for federal aid to help the city pay for additional services. In Belzoni, similar citizen action generated by MACE field workers is currently directed toward trying to bring about redrawing of the town boundary lines that exclude black residents. Altogether, MACE has generated $11 million in equalization services.

One highly visible MACE program has been the construction of a seventy-six-unit housing project, including a social center complete with recreational facilities, in the small town of Flora. Begun in 1974 and completed in 1976, the project is small by the standards of more prosperous localities. In the Delta, however, any decent new housing for the poor is more than welcome. (In all of MACE's Delta counties, the percentage of housing that lacks plumbing far exceeds the state rate of 22 per cent. In one county it is 60 per cent.)

To qualify for admission to the Flora project, a family cannot have an income above that which would make them eligible for public housing. In addition, the family must either live in substandard housing or be headed by a person sixty-two years of age or older or by a handicapped person. Rents

range from $172 to $239 a month, but tenants are eligible for federal rent supplements. Under provisions governing such supplements, each family must pay 25 per cent of its income to live in the project, but if that amount is not enough to pay the rent, the federal government will pay, directly to the developer, up to 70 per cent of the rent owed by the family.

MACE's most extensive work consists of economic development and the creation of jobs for black Delta residents. This work is carried forward by the Delta Foundation, which MACE established in June 1969 as a non-profit, tax-exempt community development corporation. It has many of the same board members as MACE, and its chairman, Charles Bannerman, is also chief executive officer of MACE.

Bannerman is the dominant personality in both organizations. A native New Yorker, he came to MACE in 1968 after two years in Washington as director of technical assistance for the Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty. After working four years as associate director, he succeeded to the directorship held by Edward Brown, a community organizer who had been the driving force behind the creation of MACE. In furthering MACE's economic-development activities, Bannerman has displayed the energy and managerial adroitness of a highly successful business executive in a growing corporation.

Although the Delta Foundation is a nonprofit organization, it has two wholly owned subsidiaries, Delta Enterprises and the Delta Development and Management Corporation, which are profit-making enterprises. Delta Enterprises is the holding company for three businesses: Fine Vines, in Greenville, which manufactures denim jeans; Electro Controls, in Canton, a manufacturer of switches used in aircraft instruments; and Mid-South Stamping Company, in Sardis, which produces metal parts for a variety of industrial purposes.

Delta's Fine Vines denim manufacturing plant in downtown Greenville is a bustling enterprise today, but at the beginning it was plagued by production problems. Most of the workers came from farm backgrounds, with no experience at all in industry, and they had to be trained from scratch. Production in the first year or two of operations fell far short of expectations. The plant had been scheduled to produce 200 pairs of jeans daily, but by the end of the first year of operations, it was producing only 320 pairs a week, and quality control was difficult to maintain. One reason, according to the plant manager, was that the inspectors, unused to management responsibilities, were reluctant to report the poor work done by their friends and neighbors.

During this period, too, organizers from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers union persuaded workers in the plant to petition the National Labor Relations Board for a union election. Delta officials had to make a hard decision. Union representation would mean higher wages and greater fringe benefits at a time when the struggling business was losing $25,000 a month. Yet because of the organization's avowed social orientation, its self-image and its reputation among its constituency would be tarnished by opposition to the union. Delta nonetheless decided to oppose unionization, on the ground that the plant had been created to provide training and jobs for disadvantaged people, and not primarily to maximize profits. Negotiations lasted six months. Many Delta officials, like

management officials in more profit-oriented companies, resented having union organizers coming into their shop and, in their view, telling them how to run their business. This resentment was fed further by the fact that the organizers were white and, according to these officials, had not previously demonstrated much interest in the general welfare of blacks.

Opposition to the union created a split in Delta's managerial ranks, which, of course, consist in large measure of people who are especially sympathetic to the needs of the poor. Indeed, one high-ranking policy maker resigned, denouncing Fine Vines as a "business for business" venture. In July 1972, a majority of the workers voted for union representation. Employees are still represented by the union, and today there is little evidence of open friction between management and union.

Improvements at Fine Vines are evident. Production is up to 850 *dozen* pairs of jeans per week. The company's gross receipts for 1977 were $3 million. Quality control now is such that the plant is able to fulfill contracts with major retailers such as J.C. Penney.

Sam Moncure, who became director of the plant in 1976, is optimistic about the future, even though finding adequate plant supervisors still seems to be a problem. At the same time, he notes the presence of several employees who, he feels, have considerable supervisory potential and, with proper training, could prove to be an important element in the plant's future success. Moncure is a white Virginian with a wide background in apparel-manufacturing management. He is dedicated to making the plant a profitable venture that can continue to provide employment for Fine Vines' 105 workers.

Robert Tewes, general manager of Delta Enterprises, is also manager of Delta's most recently acquired business, Electro Controls, in Canton, which manufactures reed switches for aircraft instruments. Delta decided to acquire the company because electronics is considered a growth industry and because, unlike many electronic products, the Electro Controls switches are fairly simple to produce and employees can be easily trained in the process. In-plant training lasts from eight to ten weeks, with an investment of approximatley $1,200 per employee. The company employs 60 people. It was acquired from Hathaway Instruments in the fall of 1974 and was originally capitalized at $850,000. Its main problems, according to Tewes, are developing greater sales volume, establishing cost controls, and keeping up with technology. The company has sales representatives in many cities in the United States and in Europe. It has contracts with major aircraft instrument companies and with RCA, Westinghouse, and Chevrolet.

Tewes, in his mid-forties, is an industrial engineer who was hired by Delta in 1971 through a management employment firm. His previous job had been production superintendent for the Cummins Engine Corporation in Indiana. He was attracted to the job with Delta in large measure by the organization's social concerns. "I represent a marriage of two worlds," he says, "social responsibility, doing something that isn't totally for profit, combined with the textbook way of doing business." Tewes played a major role in negotiations for acquisition of Electro Controls, Fine Vines, and Mid-South Stamping Company.

Mid-South Stamping, located at Sardis, 120 miles north of Greenville, was acquired by Delta in October 1971 for $150,000. The company man-

ufactures small metal parts for industrial purposes. In 1974, it acquired Delta Fan Company of Jackson, Mississippi, a manufacturer of residential and commercial attic exhaust fans. Later that year it purchased Century of Memphis, Inc., a manufacturer of folding attic staircases. The acquisitions were a natural extension of Mid-South's operations since the company was already producing metal hardware for folding staircases.

In its early days, Mid-South faltered. Many of the markets it had hoped to develop did not materialize. Its equipment was out of date and in poor operating condition. But Delta nursed it along because it felt that the initial problems could be overcome and because Mid-South was Delta's first industrial enterprise outside the Greenville area.

The first step in reversing the decline was the hiring of a new manager, John Patterson, a middle-aged executive with an extensive background in metal-parts manufacturing. Immediately before joining Mid-South he had been vice president of a metal stamping company that had annual sales of $12 million. Under Patterson, Mid-South losses began to go down, and the company was able to purchase new equipment. Through sound management and a great deal of hard work and patience, the company survived. Today it employs some 30 workers.

The Delta Foundation's agricultural enterprise, the Leflore County Area Cooperative, has grown dramatically since it was chartered in 1971 and began operations on 160 acres. MACE provided capital of $20,000 and helped obtain loans for the venture from the Southern Cooperative Development Fund and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Today the co-op has 3,000 acres of rice and soybeans under cultivation. MACE describes the co-op as the largest black agricultural production venture in the country.

The co-op's growth, however, has come about with less than $40,000 in equity capital, and it has had to borrow money to continue operations. Such borrowing is common practice in agricultural finance, but Leflore's debt-to-equity ratio at the end of 1976 stood at 24-to-1. This high ratio means there is limited capital for expansion. To attract more capital, therefore, the co-op is planning to change to a corporation. "There is a rapidly growing awareness among sophisticated investors such as insurance companies and pension funds of the long-run return on investments in Southern agricultural land, particularly rich Delta land," says Scott Daugherty, assistant director of the Delta Foundation.

Delta has provided loans to many businesses that could not otherwise have found credit. For the most part these have been small businesses, such as gasoline stations and grocery stores. One major beneficiary, however, is a black-owned FM radio station, WBAD, in Greenville, which received $30,000 from Delta. WBAD has the highest listener rating of the area's six stations. Its programming features rock, blues, and classical music.

WBAD is owned and directed by William Jackson, a native of Greenville who has worked in the broadcast industry for more than two decades. In 1972 Jackson was an announcer for the station, which was then white-owned but was nevertheless the only station that featured programming geared to a black audience. Jackson had developed a following among black listeners in the area, and when the station's owners decided to sell, he and a partner came to the Delta Foundation for investment backing. Delta agreed because the station

would be black-owned, because it had shown its money-making potential (in 1972 it had a net income of $42,000), and because it could serve as a forum for publicizing black community activities. By big-city standards the station is not physically imposing. It is housed in a small cement-block structure far off the highway in what was once a cotton field. But to the black residents of the Greenville area, it is a voice with which they deeply identify. The station currently has on file an application for AM broadcasting, which will enable it to reach more listeners and attract more advertising revenue.

As the Delta Foundation expanded it increasingly sensed a need for better-trained managers. It therefore established a management-training center in 1977. The center prepares selected current employees and other candidates for management positions within the foundation's companies and elsewhere. The center was planned with the help of academic experts and active businessmen who designed a work-study program to develop middle-management skills for employees with limited experience. The program serves two ends. It increases the efficiency of Delta's management, and it provides advancement opportunities for individual employees.

The Southeast Alabama Self-Help Association

The Southeast Alabama Self-Help Association (SEASHA) developed out of the Tuskegee Institute Community Education Program, a tutorial effort designed to provide basic literacy instruction to elementary-school students and adults in twelve Southeast Alabama counties. SEASHA, with headquarters in Tuskegee, operates in the same counties: Barbour, Bullock, Coosa, Crenshaw, Elmore, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Montgomery, Pike, Russell, and Tallapoosa. Most of these counties are poor, and even if racial prejudice were not a factor they would be unable to provide funds or technical skills for the substantial number of residents who need massive services in welfare, health, remedial education, and housing. In the decade it has been in operation, SEASHA has scored successes in economic development—mainly by enabling farmers to realize a significant income from small farm acreage through the cooperative approach—and in ameliorating the social effects of rural poverty.

Census statistics show wide disparities in economic and social conditions within SEASHA's target area. The total population of the area is 462,919, 44.5 per cent of whom are black. The median family income is $5,787, but the black family median is $3,540. Black infant mortality rates in some counties are nearly double those for whites. In the state as a whole, 15.7 per cent of the housing lacks some or all plumbing facilities. In the SEASHA area, only Montgomery County, which is mostly urban, has housing above this average. More than 60 per cent of the housing in Lowndes County, for example, is deficient in plumbing.

Before SEASHA, the needs of low-income blacks in the area were systematically ignored by governmental agencies. The federal Farmer's Home Administration, for example, which is mandated to provide equitable service to all loan applicants, paid little attention to black farmers' requests for credit. In addition, white welfare officials were notoriously unfair in their treatment of assistance claims by blacks. Thus black farmers

were encouraged to abandon farms, homes, and communities they had lived in for three generations and to migrate northward. SEASHA was formed to help stem this tide by bringing about equity in delivery of government services and by raising income levels for poor rural blacks, most of whom were working in agriculture, either on their own land or as farm laborers.

John Brown has been director of SEASHA since it was founded in 1967. Brown's involvement in civil rights activities had earlier led to his dismissal from the Phenix City school system, where he had been a high school teacher. He then served as director of the Tuskegee tutoring program before becoming head of its offshoot, SEASHA. Brown is a reserved man, but one of great energy and proven leadership

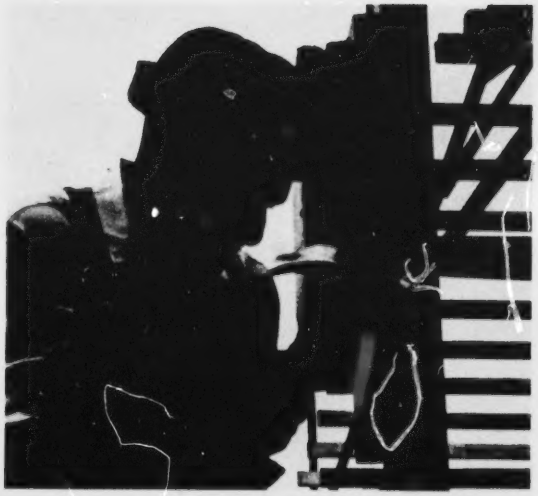
SEASHA serves as an ombudsman agency for the rural poor in its twelve counties. Its community-services division intervenes on behalf of the poor when help is needed with welfare, housing, and employment problems. It tries to help black farmers retain their land when their possession is threatened. Sometimes the threat is foreclosure for debt, sometimes it stems from a misunderstanding of deeds and wills or a lack of knowledge of land value. Occasionally outright swindling is involved. "One black farmer I know of," says Taylor Harmon, SEASHA's associate director, "lived on property next door to a white farmer. He had some land he wasn't using and the white farmer asked if he could plant on it. The black fellow had known the man for years. So he tells him, 'Yeah, go ahead.' Well, the white farmer does, and after a few years he is claiming the land is his. The people at the courthouse agree, and the black farmer is out that much land."

SEASHA's social-services program achieved a striking success in its efforts to establish the Lowndes County Health Services Association. Funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity, a comprehensive health center had been established in 1968 at Hayneville, the county seat of Lowndes County, in response to an extreme lack of sanitation and medical facilities for the county's poor. The local policymaking arm of the Lowndes County center was the Board of Health, which was made up of the county's only three doctors and one other official—all whites. Blacks were given a voice in a citizens' advisory council, but in effect the council was virtually powerless when it came to policymaking.

In keeping with its philosophy and policies, OEO applied pressure from Washington to give blacks a larger role in the decisions that regulated the program. OEO demanded that the Board of Health turn over its powers to a reconstituted board, roughly 70 per cent of which would consist of representatives of the consumers of the center's services. In Lowndes County this meant poor blacks.

The Board of Health refused, and funding for the program was terminated in December 1972. With the closing of the center, poor blacks in the county were for all practical purposes again without medical care. A National Health Service Corps physician was assigned to practice at Moss Point in Lowndes County, but the health center's equipment remained under lock and key. The doctor had no access to it, nor to the building that had formerly housed the health center.

At this point SEASHA assisted in the organization of a new health-care service, the Lowndes County Health Services Association (LCHSA).



Pig-feeder cooperative is one of the largest enterprises of the Southeast Alabama Self-Help Association. Construction of subsidized housing is another.

LCHSA was not designed to provide the full range of services that had been available at the former comprehensive health center, but at least it could meet some of the health-care needs of the poor. After a six-month battle with state and local health officials, LCHSA went into operation. Now staffed by Health Service Corps physicians, it has been able to acquire some of the equipment used in the Hayneville health center and to use the building the center once occupied.

Not all of SEASHA's social-service activities are as controversial as the Lowndes County Health Services Association. Local community-organization activities usually center on more mundane tasks. "You could spend all day getting people on welfare or food stamps, taking them through the red tape," says Mrs. Mattie Moorer, SEASHA's Lowndes County representative. Mrs. Moorer, a lifelong resident of the county, is typical of SEASHA's field workers. She has the indefatigable nature of many middle-aged black women in the rural South who have toiled hard for menial wages, generally at housework for white families, and yet have found time and energy to participate in local civil rights activities—sometimes at the risk of their economic security. Mrs. Moorer, for example, played a major role in the community organizing that led to the formation of the Lowndes County Health Services Association. She notes that white opposition to SEASHA objectives has lessened with the growth of black political strength. "You still have to fight every day," she says, but she is happy to have lived to see a measure of hope brought into the lives of the people she serves.

Since SEASHA was founded, its economic development activities have included planning and development in agriculture, housing, construction, and financial services. The organization owns and operates a diversified agricultural enterprise, a federally chartered credit union, and a construction company. It has drawn support for these and other activities from the Ford Foundation, from federal, state, and local governments, and from church organizations.

One of SEASHA's larger economic efforts is a feeder-pig cooperative. Incorporated in 1967 to provide employment and supplemental income for poor farmers, it is governed by a board of directors selected from a membership of some 300 farmers. The co-op owns its own feed mill, which produces quality feed at competitive prices. It also has its own grow-out parlor, where pigs are housed and fattened after sales, and one of nine state-graded sales barns in Alabama. At every auction at a state graded barn an official state grader is present, along with a qualified veterinarian, to certify that the pigs are disease-free. Although there are five ungraded sales barns nearby, SEASHA's graded sales barns attract the best buyers, those willing to pay a premium for better quality. Feeder pigs sold in graded sales barns bring an average of between $20 and $25. In the ungraded barn, the average is $14 and $15. The co-op also furnishes high quality gilts and boars to farmers for breeding stock, the farmer repaying the co-op by returning feeder pigs for gilts and boars in place of cash payment

Mrs. Ruby Bowie is in her late fifties and lives on a sixty-acre farm owned by her widowed mother about twenty miles from Tuskegee. Once an Avon saleswoman, Mrs. Bowie joined the feeder-pig co-op in an effort to obtain a measure of economic security and independence. Aside from her mother's small Social Security pension, the family is entirely dependent upon feeder-pig sales for its

income. When pork prices are depressed, Mrs. Bowie faces deep economic trouble. Feed may actually cost more than the revenue she receives from the sale of her pigs. At such times she is understandably discouraged, but she is not prepared to give up her independence for other work—assuming she could find it. So long as the overall trend in pork prices allows her to make even a small profit, she intends to remain in the co-op and deal with her problems day by day. In 1976 the water pump on her farm broke down. Such a mishap can be very serious for a feeder-pig operator, since the animals must have a nearly uninterrupted supply of water in order to survive. A SEASHA representative assisted her in quickly getting a $700 loan from a local bank for a new pump. She is repaying the loan out of revenue from sales of her farm's feeder pigs.

Pierce Washington understands the vagaries of the market better than most of his fellow members of the feeder-pig co-op. A graduate of Tuskegee Institute and a former schoolteacher, Washington had always wanted to be involved in agriculture and took advantage of the opportunity SEASHA offered him to enter the feeder-pig business. Washington also owns a produce market, so he takes care of the feeder-pig farm in his spare time. His two income sources earn him roughly $6,500 a year, a fairly comfortable living in rural Macon County. For Pierce Washington, the principal advantages of his affiliation with the co-op are the lower feed prices it offers and the market information it periodically supplies.

Another advantage of the co-op for almost all its members is the service provided by Luther Davis, manager of the co-op. Davis offers the co-op's members advice and assistance to help them improve their stock. He demonstrates modern methods of raising swine, including proper feeding, shelter, and health care for the animals, and emphasizes the economic value to the farmer of such procedures.

The results of Davis's efforts are readily apparent among the area's pig farms. Pierce Washington's fifty animals are strong and healthy and bring top prices at auction. A half mile down the road on a small farm operated by a non-SEASHA member, it is another story. Here the pigs are fed only garbage, the discarded food from the plates of the farm's family, who themselves live on the hard-scrabble diet of the rural poor. The animals are also ill-housed in a lean-to. As a result of such neglect, they are noticeably scrawny. "We wouldn't accept them for sale at our auction," says John Porter, a SEASHA staffer. "Of all the animals in the world it's more true of a pig than any other that it is what it eats, and God knows what those have been fed."

In a related effort toward stock improvement, Booker Pitts and Fred Lee, two young farmers operating under SEASHA's auspices, have succeeded in demonstrating that pigs will graze off the land, just as beef cattle do. Grazing reduces the cost of supplying the pigs with a proper diet. "The older farmers just shook their heads at us when we started," Pitts says. "They said hogs never graze, but so far they have."

SEASHA's credit union currently has 1,700 members. Membership means access not only to credit and some banking services but also to free life- and loan-insurance protection. Members also have the opportunity to put their savings in an institution with which they identify personally. John Porter, who directs the credit program, is hopeful

that the credit union will be able to merge with other credit unions in the area and thus acquire more assets. The credit union's assets are now $312,000, and loans to small farmers and small businesses total $183,000.

SEASHA staff members also help operators of small businesses through feasibility and marketing studies, management training, loan packaging, and assistance with preparation of financial statements, inventory control, and advertising. Most of SEASHA's help has gone to enterprises such as cafes, automobile repair shops, grocery stores, and other small-scale operations whose proprietors lacked business training and experience.

SEASHA's twelve-county area, like the other rural areas described in this report, suffers from a shortage of adequate housing. Fifty per cent of the area's rental dwellings and over 30 per cent of its owner-occupied units, for example, lack plumbing facilities. SEASHA Homes, organized to help alleviate the area's shortage of decent housing, began operating in 1975. SEASHA's original housing program dates back to the early 1970s, however, when the assoication purchased a 335-acre tract of land on the outskirts of Tuskegee for housing and commercial development. SEASHA's headquarters was constructed on the site, along with prototype homes, ranging in price from $8,000 to $16,000, for low-income occupants. SEASHA Homes is now building approximately twenty-five units per year on scattered sites in five counties.

Some of these new houses are larger and thus more expensive than the prototype units, but mortgage terms for all the corporation's housing are as favorable as possible. Under provisions of the Housing and Urban Development Basic Homes Program for low-income families, loan periods may be as long as thirty-three years. Payments on the loans, determined by a sliding scale based on the income of the borrower, may be as low as $50 a month. SEASHA also provides home-buyers with counsel on lot location and selection, evaluation of architectural plans, building codes, financing, and maintenance procedures.

SEASHA is also engaged in an ambitious program to construct a 100-unit housing project with rent-subsidy support under HUD's Section 202 housing program for the elderly and handicapped. Construction began in the spring of 1978. The projected cost of development and construction is $1.8 million, to be financed by a forty-year HUD mortgage.

In addition, SEASHA has plans for a middle-income subdivision of forty-seven single-family homes. The initial planning and engineering have been completed, including street layout and water and sewerage systems. The total cost of the subdivision is estimated at $2.5 million.

The housing project and the subdivision will both be constructed on SEASHA's tract outside Tuskegee. SEASHA plans to develop on the same site a recreation and picnic area that can be used not only by the residents of the two projects, but also by the Tuskegee community generally.

Business development is also planned for the site. Among the units planned are a pharmacy and other small stores, as well as offices for physicians and dentists.

Prospects

FROM THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA into Alabama's Black Belt and down to Louisiana's Acadian country, in rice fields and on experimental and feeder-pig farms, in electronics plants and other small businesses, a certain hope for the future is evident in the spirit of farmers, workers, and community organizers. But organizations such as those described in this report cannot alone do the job of reversing historic migration patterns by making small farms and business enterprises more viable. Specific policy changes, such as those suggested in the reports of the Southern Regional Council's Rural Development Task Force and the Southern Growth Policies Board, are needed. The board's Commission on the Future of the South, which was made up for the most part of leading Southern businessmen, put it this way: "The South can continue to depopulate the countryside or, through civic enterprise, private decisions, and public encouragement, we can locate jobs where people are instead of moving people to the city. Making it possible for young people to stay home, we could distribute prosperity and reinforce the vitality of dying places."

Such words could have just as well been spoken by Father McKnight or Charles Bannerman or John Brown, whose organizations have demonstrated that cooperative movements among poor people can function well in a climate in which basic civil rights are protected—and in a manner no more revolutionary than, say, a meeting of the board of the Chase Manhattan Bank.

Although much does remain to be done, for the first time since the exodus of the poor began more than fifty years ago, more poor people are entering the rural South than leaving,* the Census Bureau reported late in 1978. The reversal of the migration tide is also due to a tendency of the Southern poor to stay in the South and find jobs there above the poverty level, according to the report. The social climate has also changed dramatically. Black residents who assert their rights, and outsiders who seek to help them improve their social and economic condition, no longer live in pervasive danger. Slowly and sometimes with difficulty, the South's rural poor are beginning to reap some of the opportunities envisioned in the American Dream.

* *Interregional Migration of the Poor: Some Recent Changes*, by Larry H. Long (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).